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FROM BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: MASS PREL CF

SUBJECT: CONGO/B: IMET-FUNDED CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS SEMINAR (FEBRUARY 15-18, 2005)

¶11. SUMMARY: A two-person Center for Civil-Military Relations (CCMR) Mobile Education Team conducted an IMET-funded civil-military relations seminar February 15-18 in Brazzaville. The 51 Congolese participants included 22 military and 29 civilians. The program was opened by the Minister of Defense, and the opening and closing ceremonies were covered by Congolese television. The program achieved the intended Brazzaville Embassy MPP goal of encouraging open discussion and understanding between the military and civilian sectors of Congo. Follow-up sessions have been held by seminar participants to implement an action plan. END SUMMARY.

¶12. CCMR Mobile Education Team members retired Colonel Michael Mensch and Dr. Jessica Piombo led an IMET-funded civil-military relations seminar February 15-18 under the auspices of Embassy Brazzaville. It was the first CCMR civil-military seminar held in the Republic of Congo. The seminar took place at the conference facility of the World Health Organization's regional center. The team was assisted by Embassy Brazzaville staff members and USDAO staff members from Kinshasa. Planning for the program was coordinated among CCMR, USDAO Kinshasa and Embassy Brazzaville. Opening and closing remarks were given by the DCM and the director of a Congolese human rights NGO. The seminar was opened officially by the Congolese Minister of Defense (the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces also attended), and closed by the Chief of Staff of the Congolese Ministry of Defense. The program also received support from the United Nations Development Program in Congo, which gave presentations during the seminar on HIV/AIDS and on the Congolese Demobilization and Reintegration (DR) program that currently is now underway.

¶13. Mr. Mensch remarked that the Brazzaville seminar was "among the very best we have done in the past six years." He added that "the themes and topics we discussed were carefully selected" and "are the important issues of the day in the Congo." The participants, which included security forces, civil society, executive and legislative branches of the government, and the media, "represented their constituencies with vigor and candor." It was untypical, but very effective, he said, for media representatives to participate, and their presence added the very real present-day dimension of taking into account the media and the role of publicity in contemporary events.

¶14. The participants debated with the facilitators and with each other during the seminar, but they seemed united and committed to improving civil-military relations in the Congo, recognizing it as essential for the country's development and improvement. The participants provided constructive, positive feedback to the facilitators, the USDAO participants and the Embassy.

¶15. The seminar explored the relationship between the armed forces and civilians in the context of recent Congolese history. Congo continues to emerge from the 1997-2001 civil war, and civil-military bridge-building presents a broad challenge. Civilian and military participants accepted the challenge of creating professional, politically neutral and accountable armed services. They also recognized that internal security needs must be met for reconstruction to be successful. With the blueprint provided by the Action Plan developed by participants during the seminar, progress in developing better civil-military relations is achievable.

¶16. COMMENT: The seminar addressed the major MPP goal of Democratization and Human Rights by providing a forum for understanding between military and civilian sectors, as well as the media, which often find it hard to appreciate or recognize each other's roles and

perspectives. The gratitude and satisfaction that the participants expressed indicated that they gained from the seminar something that they may not have had before - the opportunity to hear and be heard across the fences separating the civil and military sectors. The facilitators suggested following up this seminar with a second seminar, focusing on the relationship between public security forces and the media and/or the legislature, or a seminar to train Congolese civil-military facilitators. The Embassy supports these ideas as constructive, cost-effective means for the United States to assist the Republic of Congo in its development. END COMMENT.

17. Embassy Office Brazzaville - Sanders

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